

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 /071 W
-----091885 072059Z /73

R 071730Z JUL 77
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5908
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
AMEMBASSY ROME
USMISSION NATO
AMEMBASSY PARIS
USMISSION GENEVA
USNMR SHAPE
AMCONSUL BELFAST
AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

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USEEC ALSO FOR EMBASSY
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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PFOR, UK, EC
SUBJECT: DIRECT ELECTIONS DEBATE OPENS

REF: LONDON 10614

SUMMARY - A TWO-DAY DEBATE ON THE GOVERNMENT'S DIRECT
ELECTIONS BILL FOR THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT OPENED JULY 6
WITH SPOKESMEN OF ALL PARTIES (AND FACTIONS) TAKING
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PREDICTABLE LINES. COMMONS WILL VOTE ON THE PRINCIPLE OF
DIRECT ELECTIONS JULY 7. IF THE BILL PASSES THIS HURDLE
-- AND WE EXPECT THAT IT WILL -- IT WILL MOVE TO COMMIT-
TEE STAGE. ITS FINAL PASSAGE, HOWEVER, CANNOT BE COM-
PLETED IN THE CURRENT SESSION OF PARLIAMENT. WHEN THE
BILL IS REINTRODUCED IN THE NEXT SESSION, THE GOVERNMENT
WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE FORCED TO INTRODUCE A CLOTURE

MOTION TO PREVENT A FILIBUSTER BY ANTI-MARKET MPS. WE UNDERSTAND THE TORIES ARE TOYING WITH THE IDEA OF WITHHOLDING THEIR SUPPORT FROM THE ANTICIPATED CLOTURE MOTION WHICH WOULD VIRTUALLY PRECLUDE ITS PASSAGE. IN THE EVENT, HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THE TORIES, WHO OVERWHELMINGLY FAVOR DIRECT ELECTIONS, WILL SACRIFICE THE BILL FOR THE PERCEIVED POLITICAL BENEFITS THAT MIGHT ACCRUE FROM EMBARRASSMENT OF THE GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. THE TWO-DAY SECOND READING DEBATE OPENED IN COMMONS JULY 6. GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN MERLYN REES AND PRIME MINISTER CALLAGHAN BOTH ENDORSED THE REGIONAL LIST SYSTEM OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION IN THEIR STATEMENTS TO THE HOUSE, STREI8, THAT IT IS THE ONLY MEANS BY WHICH THE UK CAN POSSIBLY MEET THE MAY-JUNE 1978 ELECTION TARGET DATE. THEY MADE IT CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT THEY WOULD ACCEPT THE WILL OF THE COMMONS AS REGARDS THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM. CONSERVATIVE SPOKESMAN JOHN DAVIES AFFIRMED THAT THE TORIES WILL SUPPORT THE BILL ON SECOND READING, BUT VOICED HIS PARTY'S DISPLEASURE WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S DELAY IN BRINGING THE BILL FORWARD, ITS EQUIVOCATION ON THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND ITS USE OF THE ISSUE TO BUTTRESS THE PACT WITH THE LIBERAL PARTY. HE WAS PARTICULARLY SCATHING ABOUT THE PROCEDURE USED BY THE GOVERNMENT TO ALLOW MPS TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THE PR

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AND TRADITIONAL FIRST-PAST-THE-POST ELECTORAL SYSTEMS.

2. LIBERAL LEADER DAVID STEEL, AS EXPECTED, WELCOMED THE BILL AND EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT COMMONS WOULD SUPPORT PR. THE SNP SPOKESMAN, GEORGE REID, SAID HIS PARTY WILL SUPPORT THE PRINCIPLE OF DIRECT ELECTIONS AND WILL INTRODUCE AN AMENDMENT TO INCREASE SCOTTISH REPRESENTATION IN THE EUROPEAN ASSEMBLY. BACKBENCH INTERVENTIONS FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE AISLE WERE EQUALLY PREDICTABLE. ANTI-MARKETEERS URGED REJECTION OF THE BILL, WHILE EUROPEANISTS STRONGLY SUPPORTED IT.

3. THE SECOND READING VOTE -- WHICH SHOULD BE OVERWHELMINGLY FAVORABLE PROBABLY BY A TWO-TO-ONE MARGIN -- WOULD MOVE THE BILL ON TO COMMITTEE STAGES. WE ANTICIPATE THE GOVERNMENT WILL SCHEDULE A FEW DAYS FOR COMMITTEE DEBATE (COMMONS WILL SIT AS A COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE) BEFORE PARLIAMENT RISES FOR THE SUMMER IN ABOUT 2 WEEKS. THERE IS, HOWEVER, NO REALISTIC POSSIBILITY OF ITS PASSAGE DURING THE CURRENT SESSION.

4. ACCORDINQLY, THE GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE TO REINTRODUCE

IT IN THE NEXT SESSION WHICH BEGINS IN NOVEMBER. ONCE THE BILL AGAIN REACHES COMMITTEE STAGES, WE EXPECT ANTI-EC ELEMENTS WILL MOUNT A FULL-SCALE EFFORT TO KILL THE BILL BY FILIBUSTER, AS WAS DONE WITH THE DEVOLUTION BILL

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EARLIER THIS YEAR. ALTHOUGH HEAVILY OUTNUMBERED, THE ANTI-MARKETEERS HAVE THE CAPACITY TO FORCE THE GOVERNMENT TO RESORT TO CLOTURE.

5. IT CANNOT BE ASSUMED, HOWEVER, THAT OVERWHELMING SUPPORT IN COMMONS FOR THE BILL ON SECOND READING WILL TRANSLATE DIRECTLY INTO SUPPORT FOR CLOTURE. CONSERVATIVE SHADOW FOREIGN AFFAIRS SPOKESMAN DAVIES RECENTLY INDICATED TO EMBOFFS THAT THE TORIES ARE SERIOUSLY CON-

SIDERING THE POSSIBILITY OF WITHHOLDING THEIR SUPPORT IF
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THE GOVERNMENT HAS TO INTRODUCE A CLOTURE MOTION. WHILE THE TORIES ARE UNHAPPY WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S BILL AND ITS GENERAL BEHAVIOR IN EC FORA, THEIR PRINCIPAL RATIONALE FOR SUCH ACTION WOULD BE POLITICAL. THEY VIEW THE BILL AS AN IMPORTANT, IF NOT THE KEYSTONE, ELEMENT OF THE GOVERNMENT/LIBERAL PACT AND BELIEVE THAT ITS DESTRUCTION COULD SHORTEN THEIR PATH TO POWER.

6. LEAVING ASIDE THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL ASPECTS OF THIS OPTION -- WHICH WE BELIEVE ARE AMBIGUOUS AT BEST -- WE ARE INCLINED TO DOUBT THAT THE TORIES, IN THE CRUNCH, WOULD SACRIFICE DIRECT ELECTIONS FOR PROBLEMATIC POLITICAL GAIN. FAILURE TO SUPPORT CLOTURE WOULD MEAN THAT THE ANTI-MARKETEERS WERE CARRIED TO VICTORY ON THE BACKS OF BRITAIN'S MOST VIGOROUS PRO-EUROPEAN POLITICAL PARTY. ANY FINAL DECISION, OF COURSE, WILL BE DEPENDENT ON THE TIMING OF THE CLOTURE VOTE AND THE CIRCUMSTANCES THEN PREVAILING.

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